Sustainable development at the University of Bern

Sustainability Report 2020/21
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1. Introduction

1.1 University of Bern vision

The vision of the University of Bern can be summed up in three words: KNOWLEDGE CREATES VALUE. It illustrates the overriding social developments to which the University of Bern is oriented and the mission it has to fulfill.

Knowledge is one of the most important resources we have as a society and will continue to increase in significance in future. Knowledge is the key to solving the problems facing society and dealing with global challenges. Universities make an indispensable contribution to the development and transfer of knowledge.

The University of Bern aims to provide the skills necessary to gain knowledge and then use the knowledge gained. For this purpose, the University of Bern conducts excellent research and teaching and offers high-quality continuing education and services. It distinguishes itself nationally and internationally, particularly in selected key areas that represent particular strengths for the University and are of major social and economic significance.

The University of Bern has set one of these priorities in the area of sustainability and uses its potential to make a substantial contribution to researching and shaping sustainable development.

Figure 1: Main building of the University of Bern

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1.2 Sustainable development – the understanding of the University of Bern

Sustainable development is a long-term, optimistic guiding principle for how society should develop, centered on people and their needs, abilities, and actions. Crucially, it envisions inter- and intragenerational social and economic justice, while respecting the environmental limits of natural resource use. This interdisciplinary task requires contributions at all levels of decision-making. For this reason, co-determination and participation are a core principle of sustainable development. Ideally, all actors agree on and coordinate their specific goals and measures as part of an overall vision. Viewed in this way, sustainable development is a continuous process of negotiation and compromise to balance and coordinate diverse environmental, social, and economic interests, and to settle conflicts of interest consensually and peacefully. However, this participation requires players to possess the relevant knowledge and be able to act accordingly, or be enabled to do so. In addition to appropriate institutional frameworks, research and education are key.

1.3 Sustainability reporting

As places of knowledge generation and transfer, it is a university’s duty to contribute to sustainable development in research and teaching. As companies, they are also required to use ecological, economic and social resources carefully. Since 2015, the University of Bern has carried out annual monitoring in which its commitment to sustainability in the areas of research, teaching and operations is recorded. The results of the sustainability monitoring are published every two years as the University’s Sustainability Report. This report covers the sustainability monitoring results for 2020 and 2021.
2. Research

2.1 Research profile

The University of Bern has defined five key areas in its research activities that are of major social and scientific importance. It intends to use its competences to make a special commitment in these areas. The University’s position as a comprehensive university makes it possible to address these issues from a number of disciplinary approaches and in inter- or transdisciplinary teams. The University of Bern has set one of these priorities in the area of sustainability and uses its potential to make a substantial contribution to researching and shaping sustainable development. It conducts excellent disciplinary, inter- and transdisciplinary research and teaching with an international focus on topics such as climate, managing global change (north-south) and trade regulation. Other topics, such as biodiversity and the sustainable use of resources, as well as Gender Studies are also in focus.

The University of Bern promotes sustainability research within the context of specialized, interdisciplinary research centers and, at the faculties, with corresponding professorships. The sustainability-related research centers include:

- The Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) is the Swiss center of excellence for sustainable development. As one of the strategic centers of the University of Bern, it is mandated with anchoring sustainability throughout the University's research and teaching activities. The CDE puts its research and teaching at the service of a future-proof world. The aim is to work out ways to achieve sustainable development and initiate transformation processes in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

- The Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research (OCCR) is the University of Bern's center of excellence for climate research. With its research on climate change and its effects on humans and ecosystems, the interdisciplinary research center makes an important contribution to sustainable development. The OCCR also considers the social dimensions of these unprecedented changes and provides scientific information to decision-makers and society – from the regional to the international level.

- The World Trade Institute (WTI) conducts research and teaches at the interface between law, economics and political sciences. As one of the leading academic institutes for interdisciplinary research on global trade and investment regulations, economic globalization and sustainable development, the WTI contributes to a better understanding of the legal, economic and political framework of globalization and sustainable development.

- As an interdisciplinary network, the Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies (ICFG) bundles the gender expertise of the University of Bern and operates as a center of excellence for inter- and transdisciplinary gender research at the interface between academia and practice.

- The Wyss Academy for Nature, a world-leading research and implementation center in the field of nature and humans was established at the University of Bern in 2020: Teams of scientists have joined forces with experts and representatives from the fields of politics, business and civil society on four continents to develop innovations aimed at protecting nature and ensuring its sustainable use. The implementation-oriented applications, strategies and political guidelines are tested at the hubs of the Wyss Academy and extended to other regions. The way the different stakeholders
cooperate is also new: It breaks up the conventional silos of science, nature conservation, development cooperation and political routine. In this way, scientific findings are applied quickly and can take effect.

The Wyss Academy for Nature is made possible by the Bern entrepreneur and patron, Hansjörg Wyss. The Wyss Foundation donates 100 million Swiss francs as part of the Wyss Campaign for Nature. The Canton of Bern and the University of Bern each contribute 50 million Swiss francs. Three world-renowned research institutions of the University of Bern are involved in the Wyss Academy for Nature: the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), the Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research (OCCR) and the Institute of Plant Sciences (IPS).

![Figure 2: Extraction of an ice core](image)

2.2 Promotion of research

The University of Bern creates framework conditions that are conducive to sustainability research. It does this by promoting sustainability research at specialized research centers and at faculties with corresponding professorships. In the reporting period, new professorships and endowed lectureships were added to the numerous existing professorships with an explicit focus on sustainability. Thanks to support from the Vinetum Foundation, the University of Bern was able to establish a new endowed lectureship for wild bee health at the Institute of Bee Health in 2021 and appoint Lars Straub. The endowed lectureship is intended to help combat the global decline in wild bees. In addition, two new positions were filled at the Wyss Academy for Nature in 2021: The University Executive Board appointed Edouard L. Davin as Associate Professor of...
Climate Scenarios for Sustainable Development and Kai Gehring as Associate Professor of Political Economy and Sustainable Development.

In addition to promoting specialized research centers and professorships related to sustainability, the University of Bern awards research prizes and is breaking new ground in the promotion of research with interfaculty research collaborations:

- **Research prizes**: The University of Bern awards the following research prizes in the field of sustainability:
  
  - **Bernese Award for Environmental Research**: Every two years, researchers at the University of Bern are honored for outstanding academic work that makes a socially relevant contribution or provides a basis for a better understanding of environmental and sustainability problems or their solutions and provides food for thought for practical applications. In 2021, the Bernese Award for Environmental Research was awarded for the thirteenth time. The winners were Dr. Kristina Rehberger and Dr. Elena Zepharovich. The work of Kristina Rehberger at the Centre for Fish and Wildlife Medicine exemplifies the strength of interdisciplinary, multifactorial approaches in the assessment of water pollution. Based on the concept of environmental justice, Elena Zepharovich analyzed how local actors perceive deforestation and what could be potential solutions to the land-use conflict in Chaco (Argentina). Figure 3: Bernese Award for Environmental Research © Universität Bern
  
  - **Barbara Lischetti award**: Every two years, early career researchers at the University of Bern are honored for an outstanding dissertation that addresses a gender research topic or uses a related approach. In 2020, Dr. Timothy Adams was awarded the Barbara Lischetti award. In his dissertation, he examines contract farming as a promising and at the same time controversial alternative to the threatening sale of land on the African continent.

- **Interfaculty research cooperations**: The interfaculty research cooperations (IRC) promote network projects from various academic fields and faculties. This intensifies networked and interdisciplinary research. In 2018, the University Executive Board approved three IRCs in a competitive process, two of which contribute to the key area sustainability:
  
  The project “One Health: Cascading and Microbiome-Dependent Effects on Multitrophic Health” is concerned with the relationships between environmental, animal and human health, with a particular focus on the impact of environmental changes on food chain systems. The project “Religious Conflicts and Coping Strategies” seeks a differentiated understanding of the ambivalent role of religions in conflicts in order to be able to develop adequate strategies for dealing with these conflicts. The three projects started their work in 2018. Following an interim evaluation in 2020, it was decided to continue the IRC for two years until the end of the limited four-year term.
2.3 Academic expertise in dialog and as an innovative force

2.3.1 Academic expertise in the regional and global context

The University of Bern makes its competencies in the field of sustainable development available to institutions in administration, politics and business as well as to the public, thus acting as an innovative force in the regional and global context: As part of its services, the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) advises and supports both public and private clients, for example, on all issues relating to sustainable development. In doing so, the CDE links issues at global, national and local level and supports cross-sectoral approaches to solutions.

However, the researchers at the University of Bern not only provide their academic expertise within the framework of services, but also contribute it within international committees. In 2021, for example, Bernese climate scientist Prof. Thomas Stocker was awarded the Prix Caritas 2021 for his long-standing commitment to social policy. Thomas Stocker has been working on climate change for 30 years. He was a member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and was responsible, among other things, for the fifth climate report, which served as the scientific basis of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement.

2.3.2 Initiatives and cooperations

The University of Bern is involved in international initiatives and cooperations in the area of sustainability. In the 2020/2021 reporting years, the following activity is particularly noteworthy:

- **Copernicus Alliance**: The COPERNICUS Alliance is a European network of universities that strive to integrate sustainability into teaching, research, business and management. The University of Bern has been a member of this network since 2016. In 2020, the annual Copernicus Alliance Conference, hosted by the University of Bern and the CDE for the second time in a row, was once again held online. More than 230 participants from 35 countries took part in the online conference entitled “How can we ensure quality and transformative learning for sustainable development?”. The experiences with the innovative online format were reviewed by the CDE and published as “Guidelines for Virtual Videoconferencing”.

2.3.3 Sustainability-related courses

- **Sustainability Day**: The University of Bern regularly holds Sustainability Days, which have been organized jointly with the Bern University of Teacher Education and the Bern University of Applied Sciences since 2017. In 2021, the third joint Sustainability Day of the universities of Bern took place under the motto “The future is now!”. At project stands and numerous workshops, the day showed around 350 visitors what the three universities are specifically contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but also where further action is needed.

- **Lecture series “Plastic – Magical Matter and Global Load”**: Every semester, the Collegium generale of the University of Bern organizes a series of interdisciplinary lectures on topics and questions that researchers from various disciplines examine from the perspective of their field. In the fall semester of 2021, the theme of the lecture series was “Plastic – Magical Matter and Global Load”. Plastic goes hand in hand with contradictions and a multitude of challenges that humanity and the international community have to face. The aim of the lecture series was to explore the diverse facets of plastic in an interdisciplinary manner and to examine this material from different perspectives.
• **Bern Botanical Garden BOGA:** The Botanical Garden of the University of Bern (BOGA) has been a diverse and colorful oasis in the heart of the city of Bern since 1860. It shows the fascinating diversity of plants and communicates their great importance for humans, but also draws attention to their endangerment.

BOGA regularly hosts public events such as BOTANICA 2020, which allowed visitors to learn about how non-native species benefit from globalization and climate change, displace native plants and cause economic or health-related issues through the exhibition “Invasive Neophytes – Impact of Climate Change”. In September 2021, a themed day on biodiversity was held in the Botanical Garden as part of the theme year “Nature Needs the City – More Biodiversity in Bern” organized jointly with Stadtgrün Bern.

![Figure 4: Botanical Garden](https://example.com/bo-garden.jpg) © Universität Bern

• **Swiss Governance Forum:** The center of excellence for Public Management (KPM) organizes the Swiss Governance Forum every year. In 2021, the forum, which was jointly organized by the KPM and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), was dedicated to the topic “Which country needs sustainable development?”. In addition to identifying sustainability topics, areas of conflict and challenges, practical experiences were also presented and their contextual conditions reflected on.

• **Children’s University – lecture on sustainable development:** The Children’s University of Bern aims to provide an unusual and exciting insight into the world of research in an entertaining way and enable direct contact with the lecturers of the University of Bern. The children taking part are invited to engage with a wide range of topics without pressure to perform.

In June 2021, a lecture was held on the topic of “How we can shop fairly,” in which children learned about the length of the journey goods take and how to shop in a way that supports the people living along this route and how to protect the environment.

![Figure 5: Children's University](https://example.com/children-university.jpg) © Universität Bern

• **Sustainability Science Forum:** In 2021, the Sustainability Research Initiative of the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT) created an annual event that brings together an interdisciplinary community of experts from the field of sustainability research. The first Sustainability Science Forum, which took place at the University of Bern in November 2021, focused on accelerating the transition toward sustainability. Priorities for leveraging existing knowledge and closing key knowledge gaps were discussed with research sponsors and other stakeholders.

2.3.4 Agora – dialog between science and society

Researchers at the University of Bern participate in the dialog between science and society. They are involved, for example, in Agora projects of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and in this context communicate the results of their current, sustainability-related research to a non-expert audience. The following sustainability-related Agora projects were funded in the 2020/2021 reporting years:
• CSI Alps: Geological research as a criminal investigation: New insights into Alpine geology are conveyed to pupils and teachers at Swiss high schools using new and innovative methods.

• From glacier to classroom: peer-to-peer communication to foster curiosity in science: In order to spark interest in research and provide insights into scientific approaches, the “Girls on Ice Project” is carrying out expeditions to the Findel Glacier in the Valais Alps for young women aged 15 to 18.

• Dear 2050 Humans Respond to Climate Change: The exhibition “Dear 2050: Humans Respond to Climate Change” combines original works by artists and scientists with live plenary sessions and a public Climate Science Slam.

• Science-art performances: Making co-benefits of climate mitigation visible and tangible: Artistic installations, musical and theatrical performances aim to make the effects of climate change personally tangible for people.

• Gender Trouble in the Federal Palace: Traveling exhibition on the early women parliamentarians and on the change and persistence that the political field has undergone as a result of the inclusion of women from 1971 onwards.

• Role model and prejudice – women-loving top female athletes in Switzerland: “Female football players are all lesbians anyway.” Such statements are not uncommon. But is this true? And what about ballet? Are there no lesbians in this traditionally female sport and art form? The richly illustrated portrait book breaks down taboos and dispels stereotypes.

• Confronting Hostile Terrains: The communication project “Confronting Hostile Terrains” brings the political causes and existential consequences of the deadly border policy for migrants closer to a wide audience.

In addition to the Agora projects run by the Swiss National Science Foundation, scientists at the University of Bern are developing teaching materials and playful offers that serve to impart knowledge in the field of sustainability. The spectrum ranges from interactive exhibitions through interactive learning media and multimedia teaching packages to an app for school excursions.

For example, the Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research developed the Climate Change Dossier together with other partners as part of an interdisciplinary project. The thematic dossier “Climate Change and Climate Policy” comprises multimedia learning materials and accompanying information for primary and secondary level II education, which have been developed on the basis of research and tested several times in practice. The thematic dossier has been available since 2020.
2.4 Sustainability at the University Library

The University Library attaches great importance to sustainability and has therefore made it one of the four focal points in its new Strategy for 2021–2024. Furthermore, the University Library has been participating in the Swiss libraries’ “Biblio 2030” sustainability initiative since 2018 and has had a corresponding working group ever since. This group is dedicated to developing activities to promote sustainable development within the University Library and to inform and raise awareness of sustainable development issues among staff and the general public. Since 2020, it has been providing information on the University Library’s commitment to sustainability in an internal monthly newsletter, and since 2021 on the University Library’s website.

In the 2020/2021 reporting years, the University Library also organized various courses related to sustainability. From February to October 2020, the natural science libraries held a coordinated exhibition dedicated to the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda 2030. They presented relevant content and selected literature from their collections as well as examples of research projects on sustainable development issues.

From August 2021 to July 2022, the Library of Exact Sciences presented the exhibition “Our Future on Earth: Climate Change and Science”. The showcase exhibition examined the work of Donna Haraway, Isabelle Stengers and Naomi Oreskes and highlighted their feminist critical perspective on current discourses and debates on climate change.

2.5 Digitalization

Digitalization is changing the world. Existing patterns of thought and action are being called into question by the processes of digital change. This requires new skills in a rapidly changing reality. The University of Bern is facing up to the opportunities and challenges of digitalization and wants to play an active, critical and sustainable role in shaping the digitalization process. For this reason, the University Executive Board adopted a digitalization strategy in June 2019, which was updated, supplemented and modified in 2020/2021 in light of the new challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The University wants to position itself as an academic platform for society and the economy on all issues relating to digitalization. It also aims to reflect critically on the digital transformation by examining the opportunities and risks of digitalization in its research, addressing security and data protection issues, and developing proposals for implementing the digital transformation in a responsible way. The relevant research is conducted on a monodisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary basis and is incorporated into the University's teaching.

In addition to the activities in research and teaching, a series of events has been created to promote a critical approach to digitalization. Since fall 2019, lectures and workshops have been held to reflect critically on a topic, with a focus on sustainability issues. The responsible working group of the Vice-Rectorate Quality approaches faculties, centers and other units of the University in turn to carry out the event.
3. Teaching

3.1 Education for sustainable development – the understanding of the University of Bern

Education for sustainable development enables all actors of a society to participate in the individual and societal search, learning and design process of sustainable development. These learning processes are of great importance in relation to sustainable development. Thus, researchers and, in particular, lecturers at the University have the task of raising awareness among their students to the importance of science for society and its future.

After completing their studies, graduates of the University can play a decisive role in shaping sustainable development in responsible positions in research, teaching, administration, the private sector, civil society and politics. Therefore, university education for sustainable development should enable students, among other things, to think in a networked and interconnected manner, to grasp complex society-environment impact structures and processes, and to formulate impact hypotheses about the causes and possible consequences of such processes. Establishing competencies plays a central role in the discussion about education for sustainable development.

Figure 8: Lecture at the vonRoll University Center

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3.2 Degree programs

The challenges posed by sustainable development for current and future generations can only be overcome by bringing together a variety of different disciplines and players. The University of Bern thus offers specific study programs to provide its students with the knowledge and methodical skills required to recognize the problems associated with sustainable development and to tackle them from an inter- and transdisciplinary perspective.

At the bachelor's and master's levels, the University of Bern offers study programs on sustainable development that are highly inter- and transdisciplinary and application-oriented, and are aimed at students of all disciplines and faculties.

- **Bachelor Minor Sustainable Development**: Theories, concepts, approaches and methods are taught and applied through interdisciplinary work in groups and on case studies. In addition to promoting professional and methodological skills, emphasis is placed on strengthening social, communication and creative skills, which are of key importance for inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration. The Bachelor Minor Sustainable Development is offered in the form of study programs with 15, 30 and 60 ECTS credits from the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE).

- **Master Minor Sustainable Development**: The Master Minor Sustainable Development provides research-oriented and applied content and methodological skills that enable students to deal with sustainable development issues within and across disciplines, thereby contributing their own disciplinary knowledge and skills in a productive manner. Students deal with global societal challenges relating to sustainable development, the status and perspectives of research in this regard, as well as with interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary theories and transformation approaches for sustainable development. Tuition and support is also provided for students to acquire skills in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and project work as well as skills in methodology, reflection and communication. The Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) offers the Master Minor Sustainable Development worth 30 ECTS credits.

At the doctoral level, sustainability is a core focus of the interuniversity International Graduate School North-South (IGS North-South). In terms of continuing education, the University of Bern offers a Sustainable Development course that leads to a certificate (CAS SD).

In the area of sustainability, the study programs of the University of Bern also include the master's degree programs of the Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research (OCCR), the World Trade Institute (WTI) and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (ICFG), as well as their graduate schools.

### Centers

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<th>Master’s degree</th>
<th>Graduate school</th>
<th>Continuing education</th>
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<tr>
<td>CDE</td>
<td>Bachelor Minor Sustainable Development</td>
<td>Master Minor Sustainable Development</td>
<td>International Graduate School North-South (IGS North-South)</td>
<td>CAS Sustainable Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCCR</td>
<td>Master in Climate Sciences</td>
<td>Graduate School of Climate Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTI</td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate School of Economic Globalisation and Integration</td>
<td>Master of Advanced Studies in International Law and Economics (MILE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICFG</td>
<td>Master Minor Gender Studies</td>
<td>Graduate School of Gender Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td>CAS Gender Expertise in Migration and Globalization</td>
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**Summer schools**: Every summer, the University of Bern offers students and researchers the opportunity to explore a specific topic in an international environment in various summer schools. The majority of summer
schools are primarily aimed at doctoral students and postdocs, but summer schools are also increasingly being offered for Bachelor's and Master's students, some of which are also conducted online.

The topic of sustainability is addressed in various summer schools. In summer 2021, for example, the *Virtual One Health International Bachelor and Master Summer School* took place on the theme of “Hidden players in the food chain”. Here, the participants learned about different food production systems, their challenges, benefits and future prospects in order to be able to research the links between plant, animal and human health. The *Virtual One Health International PhD and Postdoc Summer School 2021* on the topic of “Environmental pollution: from soils to human health” was offered to PhD students and postdocs, and focused on the fate, transport and health effects of pollutants in the environment. In addition, the *Online International Bachelor & Master Summer School* on the topic “The future is sustainable – it is in our hands”, organized by the *Centre for Development and Environment (CDE)*, took place in summer 2021.

3.3 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

3.3.1 Integration of sustainable development in all curricula

The University of Bern understands sustainable development as an individual and societal search, learning and design process in which all members of society participate. A participatory process such as this requires all players to possess the relevant knowledge and skills. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is thus a key component of the educational mandate. For this reason, the University of Bern pursues the goal of integrating sustainable development into all curricula and has anchored this at the strategic level.

To help lecturers integrate sustainable development into their disciplines, the University provides working materials and services. These support services have been developed by the *Education for Sustainable Development* team (ESD team) on behalf of the Vice-Rectorate Quality on the basis of existing experience in teaching on sustainable development and are constantly being further developed and supplemented. There is a wide range of support services which extends from teaching materials through workshops and consultations to a funding program:

- **Guidelines and practice-oriented publication:** The guide “Integrating Sustainable Development into University Teaching” is aimed at lecturers from all disciplines who wish to take up and integrate the interdisciplinary topic of sustainable development into University courses. It contains brief, basic information on sustainable development and education for sustainable development. In addition, experience was documented in the form of a publication entitled “Transdisciplinary Learning for Sustainable Development. Sharing Experience in Course and Curriculum Design”. The publication outlines a practice-oriented and forward-looking approach to education for sustainability development. Based on many years of personal teaching experience combined with didactic methods, the authors provide tips, tools and examples for transdisciplinary learning and teaching that can be used by lecturers from all disciplines.

- **Teaching materials:** The ESD material is freely available and will be updated on an ongoing basis. It contains sets of slides, learning videos, teaching examples and collections with links to web-based didactic and methodological tools.

- **Workshops and coaching:** The ESD team offers various services to lecturers at the University of Bern in order to jointly find the link of their own discipline to sustainable development.

- **Funding program:** The competitive funding program “Promoting Sustainable Development in Teaching” (FNE) supports lecturers at the University of Bern in developing elective courses with a
focus on sustainable development. Between 2017 and 2021, 17 projects were approved in six calls for proposals.

The FNE funding program was evaluated in spring 2021 and continued in the fall semester of 2021 (for projects from 2022 onwards).

- **Online tutorial:** The ESD team at the University of Bern developed a [two-hour online tutorial](#) on sustainable development, which was published internally at the University in November 2018. The online learning offer allows students to discover what sustainability is and what it has to do with their own discipline in an understandable and exciting way. Following the completion of the pilot phase and the evaluation process, the online tutorial has been available for use by lecturers and their students since 2020. In 2021, the tutorial was slightly adapted so that it could be included in the series of “Skills for the (digital) future” learning modules of the University of Bern.

- **SD approaches:** The ESD team is developing SD approaches that show interdependencies in terms of sustainability from subject-specific perspectives and serve as a basis for discussion and assistance for lecturers at all faculties. An initial workshop on NE approaches was held in December 2021, in which the NE approaches created up to that point were discussed with professors from various disciplines. In close collaboration with experts, links between the specialist disciplines for sustainable development were developed and presented in a concise and clear manner. These documents are available in [German](#) and [English](#).

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![Figure 9: Education for Sustainability Development University of Bern](#) © Universität Bern
3.3.2 Study booklet – Out and about sustainably in Bern

In 2021, the ESD team at the University of Bern developed a sustainable city guide for students of the University of Bern. The booklet “Out and about sustainably in Bern” invites students to consider what they need for a happy and good life and contains facts, ideas and tips in the areas of “Sustainable Development,” “On the Move,” “Food & Drink,” “At Home,” “Conscious Consumption” and “Culture and Events.”

A print version was distributed and made available to students at the University of Bern at various locations around the University at the beginning of the fall semester 2021. The vouchers included in the booklet allow students to discover new businesses and places, and can be redeemed with a valid student ID until the end of 2022.

The PDF version of the booklet is available on the ESD website and is intended to make the topic accessible to all interested parties.
4. Operations

4.1 Spatial infrastructure

The spatial infrastructure of the University of Bern is created by the Office for Real Estate and Buildings of the Canton of Bern, which pays attention to sustainability during construction and renovation. New buildings and conversions in the Canton are certified in accordance with the Sustainable Building Standard Switzerland SNBS, which is based on existing instruments (such as MINERGIE® and MINERGIE-ECO® with a focus on building ecology and energy efficiency). The aim is to achieve platinum rating. This does not apply to buildings on unsuitable building sites where certification is impossible. In the case of non-certification, the guideline “Sustainable Construction and Management” of the Office for Real Estate and Buildings is used.

The Building Development Office of the University of Bern is responsible for the maintenance and expansion of spatial infrastructure. It plans buildings that are use-specific (e.g. laboratory, office, library) but, as far as possible, are not tailored to specific users (e.g. specific institutes). In this way, it is possible to respond to changes in demand without having to immediately start rebuilding. Furthermore, guidelines are applied which aim to use rooms/spaces economically.

The new research and laboratory building at Murtenstrasse 24–28 was inaugurated in August 2021. The newly built complex combines research and central services from the Department for BioMedical Research (DBMR) and the Institute of Forensic Medicine in one location. The building offers ample space, is state-of-the-art in line with its intended purpose and was constructed in accordance with cantonal standards in the Minergie-P-Eco standard, which combines energy efficiency with ecology. The building, including the laboratory areas, is designed to be as use-neutral as possible, allowing it to be flexibly adapted to changing needs. It can also be extended at a later date.
4.2 Total energy consumption

Compared to the previous year, total energy consumption per person\(^1\) fell by 8% in the 2020 reporting year. In addition to the mild winter, the decline was mainly due to the coronavirus pandemic, particularly the lockdowns, as they reduced the intensity of use of the buildings. This can be seen both in the decrease in heating energy and in the decrease in electrical energy.

In 2021, energy consumption rose again to a comparable level before the pandemic (2019). The 8% increase in energy consumption from 2020 to 2021 is attributable among other things to the colder winter and the resulting increase in the number of heating degree days. Furthermore, moving into the new laboratory building at Murtenstrasse 24–28, which has a gas-fired autoclave, significantly increased gas consumption. On a positive note, taking the increase in the number of people into account, there was no increase in electricity consumption in 2021.

![Figure 12: Energy consumption per person and year of students and staff at the University of Bern by FTEs](image)

In 2017, the University of Bern conducted a consumption analysis in 14 areas as part of the large-scale consumer model with initial potential estimates for consumption optimization. On this basis, a cantonal target agreement with a term of 10 years was concluded in 2018 with the building owner, the Office for Real Estate and Buildings (AGG) and the Office for the Environment and Energy (AUE): An annual increase in energy efficiency of 0.41% per year (or 4.1% after 10 years) was specified for the University of Bern. This figure takes into account the fact that the University has energy-intensive laboratory buildings with a high proportion of process energy that cannot be influenced. The objectives of the target agreement were met between 2017 and 2021.

\(^1\) The number of persons comprises the students and employees as FTEs.
4.3 Energy sources

Since 2016, the University of Bern has obtained electricity from renewable sources (hydropower, biomass, solar energy). The remaining share of electricity without a sustainability certificate, which was still 0.27% in 2017, was replaced on 1 June 2018 and reduced to zero. As a result, the University of Bern has been purchasing 100% of its electricity with sustainability certificates since the summer of 2018. In terms of total energy consumption per person, the share of electricity from renewable sources was 52.4% in 2020 and 49.5% in 2021.

The University of Bern mostly uses district heating to heat its buildings: In the two years under review, 94% and 91%, respectively, of the heating energy came from district heating. The direct use of gas and heating oil was quite low at 6% and 9% respectively. It should be noted here that the increased use of gas can be attributed to the move into the new laboratory building at Murtenstrasse 24–28, which, due to the process, has a gas-fired autoclave.

At the University of Bern, photovoltaic systems are installed on the roofs of Muesmattstrasse 27, Mittelstrasse 43, the research greenhouse, the vonRoll University Center, the Center for Sport and Sport Science ZSSw, as well as parts of the Animal Clinic and, since 2021, on the roof of Länggassstrasse 128. While the roof area of Fabrikstrasse 8 has been made available to third parties for photovoltaic use, the remaining photovoltaic systems are used for self-consumption, i.e. the electricity generated by the photovoltaic systems is used at the University itself. When there is a surplus of electricity, the electricity from the photovoltaic systems is fed back into the grid.

4.4 Water

From 1995–2012, water use per person was halved despite new buildings and twice as many students. After showing a slight increase from 2014–16, water consumption dropped again in 2017/18 to undercut the levels reached in 2012. Water consumption was maintained at this low level in 2018/19, although the number of people increased (by 1% and 3%, respectively).

A noticeable decline in water consumption was recorded in the two reporting years 2020 and 2021, which is attributable to the reduction in building use caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdowns. In 2020 in particular, water consumption per person fell sharply and was around a third lower than in previous years without a pandemic. As water consumption is largely caused directly by the users, the effects of the pandemic and the resulting reduction in building use in the operational area can be seen most clearly in water consumption. Water consumption increased again slightly in 2021, but was still lower than in the years before the pandemic.
The University of Bern’s commitment to the topic of water extends beyond the operational sphere. Since 2013, the University has carried the “Blue University” label, which is awarded by the Canadian NGO “Council of Canadians”. As a Blue University, the University recognizes the human right to water, pays attention to sustainable water use, and works to ensure that water supply and use remain in public hands.

The University fulfills its responsibility in this regard in a variety of ways: It is involved in a number of national and international projects, underpinned by its many years of research into water and water management. Meanwhile, it conducts research into and teaching on the topic of human rights, thus helping to underscore the fundamental right to water.

It also maintains a sustainable approach to water and offers its own carafes and recyclable drinking bottles for students and employees to fill up. In collaboration with the ZFV student cafeterias, “Blue University” stoppered glass bottles made of recycled material were purchased in 2018 for events of up to 30 people.

Figure 13: Water consumption per person and year of students and staff at the University of Bern by FTEs

Figure 14: Blue University © Universität Bern
4.5 Waste

The University of Bern attaches importance to reducing the amount of non-recyclable waste and to fully exploiting the possibilities of waste recycling. Since 2010, it has had a waste disposal policy that takes sustainability into account and is based on the integrated product policy, which considers products along their entire life cycle. The principle “Avoid – Minimize – Recycle” applies, which is central to sustainable waste management.

Sustainable waste management at the University of Bern includes, for example, the following: Depending on the type, waste can be handed in to the Facility Services or the special waste collection point, after which it is sent for further recycling in accordance with the regulations (e.g. electrical scrap, light sources, batteries, scrap metal, various chemicals). In addition, since 2020, all University of Bern sites have been equipped with recycling boxes (paper, PET, aluminum cans, residual waste). New buildings are also equipped accordingly. With regard to other recycling measures, it should be noted that the recycling of empty toner cartridges and used toner containers has been gradually extended to the properties of the University of Bern since the end of 2017. Toner recycling was introduced at seven additional locations in the years under review and now covers a total of 25 locations.

Since 2019, “Coming tubes” made of polypropylene (PP) have been collected at the Institute of Geography (GIUB) as part of a pilot project and recycled by a recycling company. Recycling, including the transport of other plastic laboratory materials, was evaluated in 2020. The evaluation has shown that only non-contaminated plastics are currently recyclable in Switzerland. Since 2021, PP pipette racks have been recycled at various institutes.

With regard to the volume of waste, the following statements can be made for the reporting period: The volume of waste decreased by 26% in 2020. This is attributable to the reduction in building use caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Following the lifting of the lockdown in 2021 and the return to regular University operations in the fall semester of 2021, the volume of waste increased again by 6%.

4.6 Food and drinks

The University of Bern attaches great importance to the sustainability of its catering facilities. It focuses in particular on transparency and choice for its guests. For this reason, a participatory decision-making process was conducted in advance of the invitation to tender for the student cafeterias in 2020 to evaluate what the future catering service provider should offer. For example, an “exemplary use of economic, ecological and social resources” was defined as an award criterion in the tender for the student cafeterias. In 2021, the contract was awarded to the ZFV cooperative following a new tender. ZFV is committed to continuous improvement in economic as well as social and environmental aspects of sustainability. These include the expansion of the vegan-vegetarian range, closer collaboration with local suppliers for more “Bern” on campus, and much more besides. These new measures have been implemented on an ongoing basis since the fall semester of 2021.

The measures already implemented by ZFV in terms of environmental friendliness, regionality and seasonality are manifold. The ZFV Food & Beverage Charter combines the principles of catering and procurement policy in a binding overview. The aim of the guidelines is to implement responsible and sustainable thinking and actions in all ZFV establishments with clear and uniform requirements. For example, the meat (beef, veal, pork, chicken) comes predominantly from Switzerland, the coffee beans are fair trade and preferably organic, the
vegetables, fruit and potatoes are sourced from Switzerland whenever possible, and air freight is avoided whenever possible.

Introduced in 2018, the necta guidance system offers guests support in their menu selection and creates an important level of transparency: It shows allergens and nutritional values in the menu plans and has icons such as "Environmentally friendly," "Vegetarian" and "Vegan". Vegetarian and vegan dishes are a permanent feature of the cafeterias and are on the menu every day.

ZFV is committed to reducing food waste and increasing awareness of the issue. To this end, it has introduced effective tools: Raising awareness and training employees, good purchasing and quantity planning and taking leftovers into account when planning menus. For example, ZFV has succeeded in reducing the amount of food waste in relation to food sales by 26% since it began measuring food waste in the cafeterias in 2015.

To reduce the consumption of disposable crockery in takeaway catering, ZFV is increasingly focusing on reusable solutions. At the start of the fall semester 2019, the reCIRCLE system was launched in all ZFV dining halls and cafeterias at the University of Bern. In the future, ZFV will increasingly manage entirely without disposable packaging.

Figure 15: Outdoor area of the student cafeteria in the main building

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4.7 Climate neutrality

In 2020, the University of Bern set itself the goal of becoming a climate-neutral institution by 2025 in all areas in which it has a direct influence. This ambitious goal is not only a necessity for the University of Bern due to continuing unchecked global warming, but also a question of credibility, as it is one of the world’s most acclaimed research institutions in climate change research. The University of Bern therefore not only wants to conduct climate research, but also to implement its own findings in its operations and during business trips, thereby making a contribution to climate protection. The principle is to reduce CO$_{2eq}$ emissions as much as possible and to offset the unavoidable emissions with appropriate measures.

In 2019, the Coordination Office for Sustainable Development conducted extensive research and clarifications on climate neutrality in order to lay the foundations for the next steps. As air travel contributes significantly to the University’s CO$_{2eq}$ emissions, the initial focus was primarily on business trips. In June 2019, the University Executive Board approved recommendations to enable employees of the University to make their business travel more sustainable and thus reduce CO$_{2eq}$ emissions. The recommendations, which have been published as a leaflet entitled “Traveling sustainably”, contain important information on travel alternatives and more environmentally friendly means of transport. The leaflet was updated in 2020 and is available in German, French and English.

In the two years under review, the Coordination Office for Sustainable Development laid the initial foundations on the path to climate neutrality in the areas of monitoring and reduction, which are described in the following two chapters.
4.7.1 Carbon footprint

With regard to monitoring, the Coordination Office for Sustainable Development began designing the University’s carbon footprint in 2020 and initiating the corresponding data collection. The focus was on a thorough analysis of the current situation in order to identify those areas in which CO₂eq emissions occur directly or indirectly and which the University can influence. The first University-wide carbon footprint was completed at the end of 2021 and published in early 2022. Information on the preparation and the scope can be found in the respective greenhouse gas reports.

The first carbon footprint of the University of Bern was prepared for 2019. This year serves as the base year for developing abatement and offsetting measures.

The most important conclusion was as follows: The University of Bern produced a total of around 7,861 tons of CO₂eq emissions in 2019. With around 4,720 employees expressed in terms of full-time equivalents (FTE), this corresponds to average emissions of roughly 1.67 t CO₂eq / FTE per year. Some 60% of total emissions were caused by work-related air travel (4,734 t CO₂eq). Some one third of emissions (approx. 34%) arose in connection with energy procurement.

The University of Bern produced a total of around 4,742 tons of CO₂eq emissions in 2020. With around 4,854 employees expressed in terms of full-time equivalents (FTE), this corresponds to average emissions of roughly 0.98 t CO₂eq / FTE per year. This represents a substantial reduction over the previous year that is attributable to COVID-related restrictions.

Emissions from air travel declined by around 60% to approximately 33% of total emissions (1,563 t CO₂eq) due to the coronavirus pandemic. The majority of emissions (approx. 41%) can therefore be attributed to district heating.

The University of Bern produced a total of around 4,094 tons of CO₂eq emissions in 2021. With around 5,050 employees expressed in terms of full-time equivalents (FTE), this corresponds to average emissions of roughly 0.81 t CO₂eq / FTE per year. This represents yet another substantial reduction over the base year, attributable once again to COVID-related restrictions.

Emissions from air travel declined again by more than half in 2021 (from 1,563 t CO₂eq in 2020 to 616 t CO₂eq in 2021). Absolute emissions from the use of district heating remained almost the same (almost 2,000 tonnes/CO₂eq) and thus accounted for 48% of total emissions in 2021.

The figure below shows a multi-year comparison for 2019–2021 to highlight both the sharp decline in the share of emissions attributable to air travel as a result of the pandemic as well as the increase in emissions related to the natural gas supply, which is attributable to more precise data collection and the addition of new buildings. Because the general scope has changed so much, any comparison between the carbon footprints or assessments regarding the effectiveness of measures aimed at reducing air travel, in particular, would be meaningless.
4.7.2 Business trips

In order to reduce CO$_2$eq emissions in the area of air travel, the Coordination Office for Sustainable Development developed a traffic light system for University business trips, which was approved by the University Executive Board in September 2020. It defines the destinations where train travel is mandatory (green category) and the destinations where train travel has priority over air travel (yellow category). In the red category, the use of night trains is recommended in order to reduce air travel. The traffic light system has been published in German, French and English.

Figure 18: Traffic light system at the University of Bern

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The use of video communication is one of the various ways in which travel kilometers and thus environmental pollution can be reduced. Various software solutions as well as video conference rooms and mobile video equipment are available at the University of Bern. The “Guidelines for Virtual Videoconferencing” were published in January 2020. The guidelines for preparing, conducting and evaluating online conferences are based on the experience gained with the innovative format of the COPERNICUS Alliance Conference 2019. Hosted by the University of Bern and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), the conference was conducted entirely via video link and brought together more than 80 participants from more than 25 countries, including Australia, Nepal and Jamaica, in an online room. There, keynote speeches were available as videos even before the conference began in order to prepare for the discussion that followed. During the conference, participants then got involved in moderated panel discussions and interactive sessions via audio, video, or chat if desired.

4.8 Biodiversity

The gardeners at the University of Bern tend to and renovate the outdoor areas of the University properties. Since 2018, they have been following a care concept that takes sustainability into account (especially biodiversity) and applying it consistently. The nursery staff are trained accordingly.

In principle, the University of Bern likes to leave its outdoor areas as natural as possible. Chemical pesticides and fertilizers are not used, neophytes are controlled mechanically. The University's gardeners take into account, promote and incorporate native fauna and flora. Wild hedgerows, for example, are tended and supplemented with native plants to increase diversity. Whenever new plants are required, native plants are used whenever possible. In addition, new high-trunk fruit tree trunks are planted and old fruit trees are upgraded by professional pruning. The lawns are not fertilized and irrigated, resulting in species-rich areas. Whenever possible, flower lawns and flower meadows are created.

Small structures, such as piles of branches, piles of rocks and leaves, borders, and ponds, are welcomed and incorporated. Work is being carried out to ensure good links between the individual elements that serve as important food and shelter bases for small animals.

Since 2019, the nursery has been providing staff and students, as well as residents and passers-by, with information about the newly created habitats with appropriate boards and providing tips for gardens. When purchasing new small devices and machines, electric drives are selected wherever possible.

![Figure 19: Garden UniS](https://example.com/figure19.png)
5. Professional and social context

5.1 Gender equality

The University of Bern is committed to gender equality for men and women. It promotes the success of both men and women in academia with effective instruments of gender equality and career models. The aim of the gender equality policy of the University of Bern is for all faculties, departments, institutes as well as administration to perceive gender equality issues and observe them in practice. The Commission and the Office for Gender Equality, both of which have existed since 1990, advise and support those responsible in this process.

30 years of the Office for Gender Equality at the University of Bern: Thirty years ago, the University of Bern was the first university in Switzerland to have an Office for Gender Equality and was thus an early and dedicated advocate of gender equality. In 2020, milestones, successes and thematic focuses in gender equality work at the University of Bern were honored in an anniversary brochure. Furthermore, as part of the 30th anniversary, the first Summer University of Bern on the topic of “Feminism” took place in June 2021, demonstrating and promoting the transfer of feminist theory and practice in both directions. The Office for Gender Equality also published a podcast on various topics such as “What will shape gender equality and equal opportunities work at universities in the coming years?” and “Where is there a need for action to shape an equal-opportunities university?”

Action plans: The University of Bern has had an action plan for gender equality since 2013. The first action plan, which ran from 2013–16, was followed by the “Action Plan Gender Equality 2017–20”, which comprises 56 measures in eight spheres of activity.

In 2021, the University Executive Board adopted the new “Action Plan for Equal Opportunities 2021–2024”. In addition to its previous efforts to achieve gender equality, the University of Bern is now institutionally addressing the issue of diversity under the term “equal opportunities”. The action plan contains targets and measures relating to the diversity categories of gender, physical and psychological impairment, age, ethnic origin (language, nationality, skin color, migration experience, religion), social origin and status, sexual orientation and gender identity.

However, the promotion of gender equality is not only anchored in action plans at University level, but also at faculty level: Since 2016, the faculties and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) have had their own gender equality plans, each with a duration of four years. Since 2018, this is also true of the World Trade Institute.

In 2020, all eight faculties and five centers of the University of Bern conducted an assessment and adopted new equal opportunities plans for the years 2021–24. In 2021, the implementation of equal opportunity plans was initiated.

Gender equality measures: The gender equality measures at the University of Bern cover a broad spectrum. They include not only quality assurance in employment procedures and the promotion of female early career researchers, but also measures on the reconcilability of studies, profession and care\(^2\), as well as on the combating of discrimination and stereotypes. Various new measures were launched in these areas in the two years under review and the following highlights on existing measures were recorded:

- **Quality assurance in recruitment procedures:** In 2021, the guideline “Employment Processes at the University of Bern with Special Consideration of Equal Opportunities” was adopted by the University

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\(^2\) Measures on the reconcilability of studies, profession and care can be found in section 5.4. of this report.
The guideline, which replaces the 2019 “Equal opportunities in recruitment procedures” guide, systematically guides you through the recruitment procedure to fill professorships and provides lots of practical tips. In addition, the video “Female Professor Wanted” is now also available in French. The video “Recherchons professeure” was created in collaboration with the University of Fribourg.

- **Promotion of female early career researchers**: Since 2017, the Office for Gender Equality has been running the “COMET – Coaching, Mentoring and Training Women Postdocs” career program, which is aimed specifically at women postdocs and habilitation candidates from all faculties and supplements the existing faculty and student mentoring programs at the University of Bern. Around 80 women took part in the four rounds between 2017 and 2020. In the summer of 2021, the last four COMET rounds were evaluated in a comprehensive survey to assess the professional status of former COMET participants and their assessment of the support provided by the COMET program in retrospect. The career program will be continued from 2021 to 2024.

- **Horizontal segregation**: 2018 saw the launch of the cooperation project sponsored by swissuniversities “chance_be: Equal opportunities in career and study choices at Bern universities”. At the end of the four-year national cooperation project, it was decided in 2021 that the “practice/theory dialog” should be continued by the three universities in cooperation with the canton and expanded to include further equal opportunities topics. In addition, in 2021, for the first time, there was an “obstacle course” as part of National Future Day on the topic of “Traveling into the future: An obstacle course through the city of Bern to help you choose a career and study program”. Gender segregation at work was discussed in various places in public spaces. Since 2013, a Future Day has been held at the University of Bern in close cooperation with the management of National Future Day. The “obstacle course” was developed in collaboration with the equality offices of the City of Bern and the Canton of Bern.

- **Fighting discrimination**: The University of Bern is committed to creating an environment free of discrimination. This is particularly the case with regard to discrimination because of gender (sexism) and sexual harassment. In the March 2020 issue of unilink magazine, an interview with Vice-Rector Silvia Schroer was published about the zero-tolerance policy at the University and interactions between genders. Rector Christian Leumann also commented on the subject in a video statement. In the spring of 2021, the “Whoever comes too close, goes too far” campaign week was held at the University of Bern. During the campaign week, various online courses offered students, lecturers and staff the opportunity to engage with the topic of sexual harassment and deepen their own knowledge.
• **Portrait series about female researchers in Bern:** The University website “Female Scientists at the University of Bern” shows portraits of female researchers from Bern who have made important contributions in their field. The first portrait, published on the International Day of Women in Science in 2020, is dedicated to Bern’s first Vice-Rector Doris Wastl-Walter. She was the first full professor at the Institute of Geography and founding director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies.

• **Better Science – for a rethink in the academic world:** In 2020, the “Better Science” initiative was launched at the University of Bern. It calls for a rethink in academia away from the paradigm of speed and towards more sustainability, diversity and quality. The website “Better Science” introduces the topic and invites people to sign the ten calls to action that enable a healthier academic culture in Switzerland and beyond at an individual level.

• **“Prix Lux” equal opportunities prize:** The University of Bern has been awarding the “Prix Lux gender award” since 2017 to individuals or entities that actively promote equality in the field of gender and diversity. In 2021, the prize was renamed the “Prix Lux equal opportunities prize” in order to take account of the importance of general diversity in addition to gender equality. The “Prix Lux” was awarded in 2020 to the “SD Governance and Human Resources” office of the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE). The CDE contributes to greater equal opportunities with generational tandems and a partial retirement model. In 2021, the “Prix Lux” was awarded to the Institute of Geography (GIUB) for its longstanding commitment to equal opportunities and pioneering work for an inclusive academic culture.

• **National cooperation projects:** Since 2019/2020, the University of Bern has been involved in inter-university cooperation projects as part of the swissuniversities “Equal Opportunities and Higher University Development” program. For the period 2021–2024, it is the leading house of the swissuniversities P7 cooperation project “Better Science” and is participating in various national P7 cooperation projects, such as “More diversity among young medical managers”, “Selectivity based on social background at universities” and “National Campaign on Sexual Harassment at Universities”.

**Gender share:** The University of Bern pursues the goal of achieving an appropriate proportion of both genders at all levels. At the professorship level, the University defined the following targets in its 2017–20 action plan: By 2020, the aim is to have 25% of full and associate professorships held by women, and 40% of assistant professorships with tenure track.

In 2020, at 51.2%, the proportion of women among assistant professorships with tenure track was well above the target value of 40%. As in the previous year, the proportion of women among full and associate professorships increased slightly in 2020. At 23.4%, however, it was still below the target of 25%.

In the 2021–24 action plan, the target values were adjusted as follows: By 2024, the aim is to have 33% of full and associate professorships held by women and 40% of assistant professorships with and without tenure track.

In 2021, at 52.9%, the proportion of women among assistant professorships with and without tenure track was well above the target value of 40%. The increase in assistant professorships with tenure track is particularly noticeable (from 51.2% in 2020 to 63.2% in 2021). The proportion of women among full and associate professorships continued to rise and stood at 24.4% in 2021.

In summary, the proportion of women in both full and associate professorships and assistant professorships increased in the two years under review. While the targets for full and associate professorships were not met in 2020 and 2021, despite rising figures, the targets for assistant professorships were exceeded in both years.
However, it should be noted that the absolute number of cases for assistant professorships with tenure track is small, which is why they are subject to greater fluctuations.

5.2 Diversity

The University of Bern is committed to implementing the principles of equal opportunity and enabling students with disabilities and/or a chronic illness to participate equally in university life. In order to ensure that the University facilities and services can be used by as many groups of people as possible, the University takes the following measures:

**Adjustment of the study situation:** The Admissions Office provides support for students and prospective students. It is the first port of call and helps students to find the right person to contact (e.g. for compensating for disadvantages in academic attainments or evaluations). The Admissions Office also provides support in the preparation of the application for compensation for disadvantages. Employees from the Admissions Office also accompany students to academic student advice meetings if a student so desires.

**Lecture halls:** In construction projects, attention is paid to obstacle-free buildings and lecture halls. Information on obstacle-free accessibility (such as wheelchair accessibility and induction systems) can be found in the study profile sheet (KSL) under the details of the lecture halls in the “Building for All” section.

**Web accessibility:** The University of Bern website was designed and implemented in accordance with the latest accessibility guidelines and can be read by screen readers. In 2021, the IT Services Office of the University of Bern switched to a new ZMS version (ZMS5: Open Source Content Management for Science, Technology and Medicine). The latest guidelines regarding accessibility and usability are supported by the system.

**New Coordination Office for Equal Opportunities:** In 2021, the University Executive Board approved the creation of a coordination office for equal opportunities within the Office for Gender Equality. The new Coordination Office for Equal Opportunities will be filled at the beginning of 2022 and will be responsible for the areas of disability, chronic illnesses, mental health and racism.

5.3 Promotion of early career researchers

The University of Bern offers a wide range of research fields and achieves international excellence in several of them. The University depends on motivated, inquisitive and critical early career researchers so that findings of great scientific and social relevance can continue to be obtained in the future. For this reason, it places great emphasis on the sustainable promotion of early career researchers, enabling them to develop their full potential. The diverse support measures include a wide range of contact points, courses on offer and funding instruments.

**Reforms:** In accordance with its “Strategy 2021”, the University of Bern is characterized by the targeted promotion of early career researchers: The University aims to make it easier for intermediate staff to embark on an academic career and to create appropriate, internationally competitive employment conditions. In order to make academic career paths easier to plan, the University Ordinance was revised on February 1, 2019. A key component of the revision is the improvement of the framework conditions for the promotion of early career researchers. The design of the tenure-track assistant professorship was thus improved. Furthermore, the new position of tenure-track assistant lectureship offers an alternative career path for those who would like to specialize in teaching, services or technology, for example. There are also new job categories for
postdoctoral researchers, which replaced the previous senior research assistantships and research assistantships with a dissertation as of August 1, 2019. These adjustments ensure that young researchers come across attractive academic career paths following their doctorate.

**Completing a doctorate at the University of Bern:** As a comprehensive university with eight faculties, the University of Bern offers early career researchers attractive structures for a promising doctorate. Early career researchers can complete their doctorate either in one of the seven graduate schools or in one of around 30 doctoral programs or as part of an individual doctorate. Graduate schools and doctoral programs are arranged on an interdisciplinary and/or interuniversity basis in many cases. In addition to research-related training and intensive support, these also offer excellent opportunities for networking within the academic community. The University Executive Board has allocated University funds to support doctoral programs for the period from 2021 to 2024. The “University of Bern Doctoral Programs 2021–2024” funding program is intended to further strengthen the quality and attractiveness of the doctoral degree program, as well as intensify the supervision of doctoral students and thus improve the career prospects of early career researchers both within and outside the university.

The goal of doctoral education at the University of Bern is not only the academic qualification, i.e. the dissertation, but also the acquisition of interdisciplinary competencies in order to prepare doctoral students for a challenging position inside and outside the University. Therefore, various offices and institutions at the University of Bern offer events for career planning and the acquisition of key skills, such as the free course program “Transferable Skills” for (post)doctoral students.

**Funding instruments:** The University of Bern supports researchers at doctorate and post-doctorate level with specific funds:

- The [fund for the promotion of young researchers](#) supports networking activities of young researchers from the doctoral level onwards.
- With the “UniBE Initiator Grants”, early career researchers at the University of Bern are supported after their doctorate in the preparation of applications for external funding. These applications can be intended for individual promotion (personal promotion) as well as for the promotion of individual projects (project promotion).
- Since 2020, postdocs with care responsibilities have been supported with the “120% care grant” from the University of Bern. The funding instrument enables early career researchers with care responsibilities who have a level of employment of between 80% and 100% to reduce their level of employment to at least 60% for a maximum of 12 months and to hire a support person with an overlapping workload. Since 2021, in addition to postdoctoral researchers, young lecturers in a qualification phase, assistant lecturers and assistant professors with care responsibilities have also been eligible to apply.
- Periods of research at universities and research institutions abroad are an important part of successful academic activity. With the “UniBE Doc.Mobility” funding instrument introduced in 2021, the University of Bern supports doctoral students during their research stays abroad.
Points of contact: Early career researchers will find advice and support at various points of contact at the University of Bern:

- The Coordination Office for the Promotion of Early Career Researchers, created in 2013, is a central point of contact for doctoral and postdoctoral students from all faculties. It coordinates projects across the University, organizes specific funding schemes, and, by advising young researchers, is part of the Grants Office. In addition, since 2016 it has been supporting the development and implementation of a University-wide strategy and a package of measures to improve academic career conditions at the University of Bern.

- Founded in 2016, the Grants Office is the central point of contact for all researchers at the University of Bern and ensures the necessary support from initial advice to final completion of the project. Advice and support is provided for national and international funding vehicles of public funding agencies.

- The intermediate staff association of the University of Bern MVUB represents intermediate members of the University in their academic and professional interests with respect to the University as well as boards and authorities outside the University. It sees itself as a point of contact and service center for intermediate staff. The MVUB is also the point of contact for a wide range of concerns, particularly with regard to employment relationships at the University of Bern. Furthermore, regular courses such as the MVUB lunch talks and the doc and postdoc meetings are organized by the intermediate staff association.

- The Career Service supports students and doctoral students at the University of Bern in their transition from studies to professional life. The numerous offers include seminars, workshops and training courses, as well as the “Career Entry Forum”, which has been held annually since 2019.
5.4 Working conditions

5.4.1 Balancing career and family

The University of Bern is aware that the professional and academic paths of its students and staff are influenced by family, private and job-related circumstances. They are involved not only in their professional field of activity but also, for example, in caring for children, in their partnerships, in caring for relatives and in voluntary work. The University of Bern wants to take the personal circumstances of its employees and students into account in the working and study conditions and therefore takes correspondingly wide-ranging measures, which are constantly being expanded and further developed by the Office for Gender Equality. Information on the topic of the “Compatibility-friendly University of Bern” has been compiled on one website. The services offered range from counseling and courses to support services and infrastructural measures.

- **KIHOB, the foundation offering childcare for institutions of higher education in Bern**, promotes and ensures additional family care and support for children of members of the University of Bern and the Bern University of Teacher Education and other people from areas associated with the universities.
- The two-year pilot project “Plan B” was launched in 2019: The pilot project initiated by the Office for Gender Equality and the KIHOB Foundation is an emergency care service provided by caregivers of the KIHOB Foundation at a person’s place of residence in the case of extraordinary bottlenecks such as illness, absence of partners, lack of family support, examinations or graduation or work-related absences of university staff. Following a two-year pilot phase, the project has been continued under the umbrella of the KIHOB Foundation since 2021.
- A **child- and family-friendly infrastructure** is specifically provided and expanded by the University of Bern. The corresponding infrastructure includes parent/child rooms, changing tables, medical and breastfeeding rooms, children’s highchairs in student cafeterias and dining halls, and play boxes.
Since 2016, a roadmap has provided an overview of all family-friendly locations at the University of Bern. The range of family-friendly locations and the roadmap are constantly being expanded. For example, four new parent/child rooms were opened at various locations of the University of Bern in the 2020/2021 reporting years.

- The Office for Gender Equality offers coaching on reconcilability in collaboration with the “UND Office – Families and Gainful Employment for Men and Women”. The offer is aimed at all employees and students of the University of Bern and their partners.
- The University of Bern is making every effort to take account of the extraordinary situation resulting from the coronavirus pandemic and recognizes that student and working parents as well as members of the University with care responsibilities are unable to perform their workload to the usual extent due to the pandemic. In 2020/2021, the “unibe@home” exchange platform offered students, lecturers, researchers and staff of the University of Bern the opportunity to network, discuss problems, give tips and offer and/or take advantage of support on ILIAS. The aim of the platform is to create transparency and promote mutual understanding in this exceptional situation.
- The University of Bern strives to give its employees the opportunity to work in contemporary work models. That is why it welcomes and encourages job sharing. This flexible working time model helps to strike a balance between work and other areas of life. Since the beginning of 2019, the University of Bern has had a relief pool for professors with care responsibilities and for job-sharing tandems.
- As part of the “Dual Career” program, the University of Bern has been supporting partners of newly arrived foreign academics (from postdoc level) in their new career start in Switzerland since 2016. In 2018, the University signed the “Letter of Intent” for the Swiss Academic Dual Career Network (S-ADCN). The network supports cooperation and networking between the participating institutions with the aim of creating more attractive framework conditions for dual-career partnerships in the Swiss higher education and research landscape.
- The University of Bern has been a member of the association "Familie in der Hochschule" (Family at the University) since 2016. It was the first Swiss university to sign the international charter “Familie in der Hochschule” (Family at the University) and thus became a member of the Best Practice Club – a network of 120 universities.

Figure 22: Work-life balance-friendly University of Bern

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5.4.2 Health and safety

**Occupational safety, health protection and environmental safety:** The University of Bern attaches great importance to occupational safety, health protection and environmental safety. A corresponding risk management system is established at the University and is supervised by the Risk Management Office. The Office advises and supports the University Executive Board as well as the faculties, institutes and administrative departments with regard to risk management, occupational safety, health protection, environmental safety and crisis management. The Office also offers the following courses and projects:

- The Risk Management Office offers employees annual courses in occupational safety, health protection and environmental safety.
- Since 2017, the Risk Management Office has offered advice on designing workplaces to ensure furniture and screens suit personal needs. In addition, University employees have been able to qualify as an internal “Ergonomics Consultant RMO” since 2018.
- Since 2012, the Risk Management Office at the University of Bern has coordinated the national Pro Velo Switzerland campaign “bike to work”. The University pays the “bike to work” participation fee. Since 2018, the University has also been awarding internal prizes in addition to the many prizes that “bike to work” awards. In 2020, the “bike to work” campaign was postponed from spring to fall due to the coronavirus pandemic. As many employees worked from home and exercise is particularly important here, a new rule was introduced: All participants were also able to enter private bicycle rides on days when working from home in the “bike to work” calendar. In 2021, the University of Bern did not take part in the campaign due to the ongoing pandemic.
- In 2018, the University launched a new website that provides important information on protective measures at work during pregnancy.
- The Risk Management Office has produced five “explanatory videos” in collaboration with the Support Center for ICT-aided teaching and research at the University of Bern (iLUB), which were released in July 2021. The videos can be used for initial instruction on occupational safety, health protection, and environmental safety (OHE) in the institutes and are particularly suitable as a supplement to visualizing OHE instruction, especially for line managers and authorized persons.

**“Healthy University of Bern” initiative:** The Faculty of Human Sciences at the University of Bern is developing an occupational health management system for the employees of the University on behalf of the University Executive Board. The aim of the “Healthy University of Bern” initiative is to establish sustainable health promotion and prevention and to create a working environment and an organizational culture in which health and well-being are promoted and employees are enabled to reach and develop their full potential. In 2021, a committee was formed for the initial phase of the “Healthy University of Bern” initiative, with the involvement of professors from the Faculty of Human Sciences. In addition, a systematic needs analysis was carried out in order to identify existing strengths and areas for action with potential for improvement. On this basis, programs and measures are to be developed that can be implemented in the long term and are sustainable.

**University Sports:** With its varied sports and exercise program, University Sports makes an important contribution to promoting the health and well-being of students and employees. The offer includes a wide range of supervised training, courses, competitions and events. In addition, University Sports offers advice and provides infrastructure for independent training. Since 2015, University Sports has had an official mission statement that specifies guiding principles for sustainability. The University of Bern supports proven top athletes with flexible curricula so that they can combine their studies and sport in the best possible way. Furthermore, the subject of combining top-class sport with studies
has been added to the University's website as an additional advisory service, and contact persons in the individual faculties have been named.

During the coronavirus pandemic, new ways had to be found for University Sports in a very short period of time. For example, the website “unisport@home” was created with lots of exercise ideas, training tips and training videos. In addition, selected courses were offered online in the pandemic years of 2020/2021 in order to support the well-being and satisfaction of students and staff at home. After the lockdown, the University Sports program was gradually resumed, taking into account the protection concepts.

In consultation with the Office for Gender Equality, it was decided in 2021 that University Sports would establish a systematic monitoring system to anchor equal opportunities and gender equality. An initial analysis of gender distribution in the 2020/2021 academic year yielded the following results: Overall, University Sports is relatively balanced in terms of gender distribution. The increase in the number of men among permanent employees is attributable to “Facility Services”, where no women are currently employed. There are major differences within the sports areas. 75% of fitness courses are run by women, while 71% of sports are run by men.

Figure 23: University Sports © Universität Bern

5.4.3 Continuing education

As a strong and growing institution of continuing education, the University of Bern supports lifelong learning and encourages its employees accordingly. The Human Resources Office publishes a dedicated list of providers of personnel development measures and additional information on the topic on a website.

- **University course program:** The University of Bern’s offerings include numerous internal continuing education courses, ranging from subject and methodology courses to leadership, personal and social skills, as well as topics such as health and safety. The courses are offered by various University units, such as the Centre for University Continuing Education (ZUW), the Office for Gender Equality
and the Risk Management Office. These courses supplement the courses offered by the Cantonal Human Resources Office and are geared to the needs of the employees.

- **Cantonal course program:** As an employer, the Canton of Bern supports the broadening and deepening of the professional skills of its staff. In the central course program of the Bern Cantonal Human Resources Office, employees of the cantonal administration will find courses that support and facilitate their daily activities with concrete and practical content.

![Participants in continuing education](image-url)

**Figure 24: Participants in continuing education**

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6. Finances and Governance

6.1 Finances

6.1.1 Funding

The University of Bern is financed by the annual cantonal contribution as well as by other sources of funding, in particular basic and investment contributions from the federal government, contributions for students from intercantonal agreements (IUK) and external funding.

**Basic funding:** The share of the sponsoring canton remained relatively constant at 34.8% in 2020 and 34.4% in 2021. This balanced and reliable basic funding is an essential prerequisite for the independence of the University and its researchers. The contributions of other cantons in accordance with the *Intercantonal University Agreement (IUV)* and the basic contributions of the federal government expand the foundation of University independence. They were also stable in 2020/21, accounting for a total of around 24% of total funding.

**External funding:** The share of external funding amounted to 39.2% in 2020, a slight increase over the previous year in spite of the coronavirus pandemic. At 39.1%, the share of external funding remained at this high level in the 2021 reporting year. The high proportion of competitively acquired external funding from the public promotion of research is considered proof of success for high academic performance: The researchers at the University of Bern were very committed and successful in competitively acquiring funds.

**The impact of COVID-19:** As has been the case for all institutions and companies, COVID-19 has also had a major impact on the University. The uncertainties and restrictions have led to a significant increase in workload in teaching, research and administration. At its weekly meetings, the University’s crisis management team implemented the decisions of the authorities in such a way that teaching and research operations could be maintained. For example, a solution was developed and implemented to support researchers whose projects were extended due to the requirements imposed by the pandemic. The financial consequences of the pandemic will be particularly reflected in the balance sheet in the coming years.

**Transparency:** For accounting purposes, the University of Bern applies the Swiss GAAP FER accounting standard. Swiss GAAP FER was created as a set of rules to facilitate and promote the comparability of annual financial statements. The overriding principle of Swiss GAAP FER is to present a true and fair view of the net assets, financial position and results of operations.

6.1.2 Sustainable procurement and financial assets

**Sustainable procurement:** The University of Bern strives to increasingly consider sustainability criteria in procurement. It has already developed and implemented corresponding projects in the areas of cleaning agents and paper.

Since 2019, the University of Bern has had a [webshop](#) with over 50 articles. The range is constantly being expanded and ranges from hoodies to power banks. When selecting products, the webshop takes environmental and social sustainability aspects into account and provides information on the sustainability commitment of its suppliers on its website: The store partner Pandinavia, for example, pays attention to compliance with fair working conditions when choosing products. In addition, the webshop has been purchasing all items ordered via Pandinavia in a CO₂eq-neutral manner since 2019.
Financial investments: The University of Bern is also committed to sustainability in the area of financial investments and therefore, in 2018, decided to invest only in sustainable financial products in its asset management mandates. In 2021, the securities custody accounts of the University of Bern were subject to new regulations by the Finance Office. Investment regulations that take account of sustainability have been drawn up as the basis for the new regulation.

6.2 Governance

Sustainability management: The University of Bern takes its ethical responsibility seriously and is committed to integrating sustainability as an interdisciplinary issue across all areas of the University and promoting the careful use of ecological, economic and social resources. The University has thus accordingly incorporated the subject in its Mission Statement as well as in its “Strategy 2021”. It also has a sustainability mission statement defining the principles to which the University wants to orient itself long term in the areas of research, teaching and business operations.

In order to be able to continuously develop further in the area of sustainability, the University sets itself corresponding goals, takes appropriate measures and reviews their implementation. This systematic process of quality assurance is based on the sustainability monitoring that the University conducts annually. Based on the findings obtained in the monitoring process, the University of Bern sets itself goals and defines measures for a period of four years. The sustainability goals are defined in the University’s quality strategy. The corresponding measures and responsibilities are defined in the University action plan as well as in the faculty action plans. Quality assurance is carried out as part of the University’s management loop.

In addition to sustainability monitoring, the results of which have been published every two years since 2016 in the Sustainability Report of the University of Bern, the University has had a carbon footprint since 2021. The first carbon footprint was prepared for the reference year 2019.

Organizational structure: In the organizational structure of the University of Bern, sustainability is anchored at a high level – the Vice-Rectorate Quality. Since 2012, there has been a Coordination Office for Sustainable Development as well as a permanent Commission for Sustainable Development. All faculties, the University Executive Board, the intermediate staff, the students, the administrative management and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) are represented in the latter.
**Participation:** Participation is a central instrument for shaping sustainable development. The University of Bern accordingly attaches great importance to participation and promotes co-determination among employees at all levels as well as students. The University involves its members in self-governance and involves them in decision-making processes. This is reflected in the University’s structure: All levels are represented in the University commissions and the Senate.

![Botanical Garden University of Bern](image)

*Figure 26: Botanical Garden University of Bern © Universität Bern*